

## CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A key for operating a security fastener having a lock pattern, said key comprising a retractable key pattern having an operational extension position in which said key pattern is enabled for substantial engagement with a security fastener having a matching lock pattern, thereby allowing operation of the matching security fastener, and a non-operational retraction position in which said key pattern is not capable of substantial engagement with a security fastener having a non-matching lock pattern, thereby preventing operation of the non-matching security fastener.
2. A key in accordance with Claim 1 further including a retraction control member adapted to resist movement of said key pattern from said extension position to said retraction position until a tampering force in excess of a normal operational force is applied to said key pattern.
3. A key in accordance with Claim 2 wherein said retraction control member comprises a biasing element.
4. A key in accordance with Claim 3 wherein said biasing element comprises a spring.

5. A key in accordance with Claim 3 wherein said biasing element comprises a deformable resilient material;
6. A key in accordance with Claim 2 wherein said retraction control member comprises a breakable element.
7. A key in accordance with Claim 6 wherein said breakable element comprises a breakable key pattern support flange.
8. A key in accordance with Claim 6 wherein said breakable element comprises a breakable key pattern support pin.
9. A key in accordance with Claim 2 wherein said retraction control member comprises a crushable element.
10. A key in accordance with Claim 2 wherein said retraction control member is adapted to return said key pattern from said retraction position to said extension position after said tampering force is removed.
11. A key in accordance with Claim 1 further including a stop surface adapted to contact a surface of a non-matching security fastener as said key pattern retracts to said retraction position.

12. A key in accordance with Claim 1 wherein said key pattern is configured for use with a vehicular security fastener.

13. A key in accordance with Claim 1 wherein said key pattern is configured for use with a non-vehicular security fastener.

14. A key in accordance with Claim 1 wherein said key pattern comprises one of a male or female, continuous or non-continuous, curvilinear or non-curvilinear pattern or drive configuration.

15. A key for operating a security fastener having a lock pattern, said key comprising:

a housing;

a key well in said housing;

a key head slidably disposed in said key well;

a key pattern on one end of said key head; and

said key pattern being retractable by virtue of slideable movement of said key head in said key well between an operational extension position in which said key pattern is enabled for substantial engagement with a security fastener having a matching lock pattern, thereby allowing operation of the matching security fastener, and a non-operational retraction position in which said key pattern is not capable of substantial engagement with a security fastener

having a non-matching lock pattern, thereby preventing operation of the non-matching security fastener.

16. A key in accordance with Claim 15 further including a retraction control member adapted to resist movement of said key pattern from said extension position to said retraction position until a tampering force in excess of a normal operational force is applied to said key pattern.

17. A key in accordance with Claim 16 wherein said retraction control member comprises a biasing element disposed between said key well and said key head.

18. A key in accordance with Claim 17 wherein said biasing element comprises a spring.

19. A key in accordance with Claim 17 wherein said biasing element comprises a deformable resilient material.

20. A key in accordance with Claim 16 wherein said retraction control member comprises a breakable element disposed between said key well and said key head.

21. A key in accordance with Claim 20 wherein said breakable element comprises a breakable key pattern support flange.

22. A key in accordance with Claim 21 wherein said breakable element comprises a post that extends into an opening in said key head, said key head being adapted to slide on said post while said key pattern moves to said retraction position after said support flange is broken or otherwise compromised.

23. A key in accordance with Claim 21 wherein said breakable element comprises a bushing that mounts said support flange and is adapted to slide in said key well while said key pattern moves to said retraction position after said support flange is broken or otherwise compromised.

24. A key in accordance with Claim 23 wherein said bushing comprises an aperture that receives a stem on said key head.

25. A key in accordance with Claim 20 wherein said breakable element comprises a breakable pin extending transversely through openings in said housing and either adjacent to said key head or through an opening in said key head.

26. A key in accordance with Claim 16 wherein said key well is closed-ended and said retraction control member comprises a crushable element disposed between a closed end of said key well and said key head.

27. A key in accordance with Claim 16 wherein said retraction control member is adapted to return said key pattern from said retraction position to said extension position after said tampering force is removed.

28. A key in accordance with Claim 15 further including a stop surface adapted to contact a surface of a non-matching security fastener as said key pattern retracts to said retraction position.

29. A key in accordance with Claim 28 wherein said housing comprises a shroud that provides said stop surface.

30. A key in accordance with Claim 28 wherein said stop surface is provided by a ledge extending generally transversely from an edge of said key well.

31. A key in accordance with Claim 28 wherein said key comprises plural stop surfaces.

32. A key in accordance with Claim 15 wherein said key head is retained in said key well by staking an edge portion of said key well.

33. A key in accordance with Claim 15 wherein said key head is retained in said key well by a retainer clip situated proximate to an edge portion of said key well.

34. A key in accordance with Claim 15 wherein said key well and said key head comprise mutually slideable surface portions that are shaped to prevent rotation of said key head in said key well.

35. A key in accordance with Claim 15 wherein said housing comprises a base end that is adapted to receive a handle or a tool.

36. A key in accordance with Claim 35 wherein said housing base end comprises one of a male or female drive configuration.

37. A key in accordance with Claim 15 wherein said key pattern is configured for use with a vehicular security fastener.

38. A key in accordance with Claim 15 wherein said key pattern is configured for use with a non-vehicular security fastener.

39. A key in accordance with Claim 15 wherein said key pattern comprises one of a male or female, continuous or non-continuous, curvilinear or non-curvilinear pattern or drive configuration.

40. A key for operating a security vehicular wheel lug nut or lug bolt fastener having a lock pattern, said key comprising:

a housing;

a key well in said housing;

a key head slidably disposed in said key well;

means for retaining said key head in said key well;

a key pattern on one end of said key head;

said key pattern being retractable by virtue of slideable movement of said key head in said key well between an operational extension position in which said key pattern is enabled for substantial engagement with a security fastener having a matching lock pattern, thereby allowing operation of the matching security fastener, and a non-operational retraction position in which said key pattern is not capable of substantial engagement with a security fastener having a non-matching lock pattern, thereby preventing operation of the non-matching security fastener;

means responsive to a tampering force on said key head in excess of a normal operational force for controlling retraction of said key pattern from said extension position to said retraction position.